

# **Caliente Mountain**

*CA-010-042*

## CALIENTE MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS STUDY AREA (WSA)

(CA-010-042)

1. THE STUDY AREA — 18,083 acres

The Caliente Mountain WSA is located in the extreme southeast portion of San Luis Obispo County. It is located at the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley, approximately 45 miles southwest of Bakersfield. The WSA includes 17,590 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land, 452 acres of State land and 41 acres of private inholdings for a total of 18,083 acres (see Map 1 and Table 1).

The WSA is bounded to the north and west by private land, to the south by private land and a ranch road, to the east by Horse Canyon Road, and the east fork of the Sulphur Canyon drainage, and an unnamed drainage directly opposite the ridge from the east fork Sulphur Canyon drainage.

The WSA includes Caliente Mountain and is bordered by the Carrizo Plains on the north and Cuyama Valley on the south. The topography of the WSA is rugged, consisting of steep canyons and high, sharp mountains and ridges. The elevation of the WSA varies from 5,104 feet above sea level at Caliente Mountain to 2,100 feet at the mouth of Post Canyon. Vegetation varies from dense chaparral and juniper along ridgelines to scattered shrubs and annual grasses in canyon floors. The WSA lies entirely within the 58,867-acre Caliente National Cooperative Land and Wildlife Management Area (NCLWMA) established on April 6, 1961 by Public Land Order No. 2326. The NCLWMA is cooperatively managed by BLM with the California Department of Fish and Game (CDF&G).

The WSA was studied under Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Suitability recommendations were analyzed in the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) for the Central California Study Areas. A summary of the area's wilderness values was included in the Final EIS. Two different suitability recommendations were analyzed in the EIS: all wilderness and no wilderness.

2. RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE — 0 acres recommended for wilderness  
17,590 BLM acres recommended for non-wilderness

No wilderness is the recommendation for this WSA. The entire acreage in the WSA is released for uses other than wilderness. The all wilderness alternative is considered to be the environmentally preferred alternative as it would result in the least change from the natural environment over the long term. The no wilderness alternative will be implemented in a manner which will use all practical means to avoid or minimize environmental impacts.

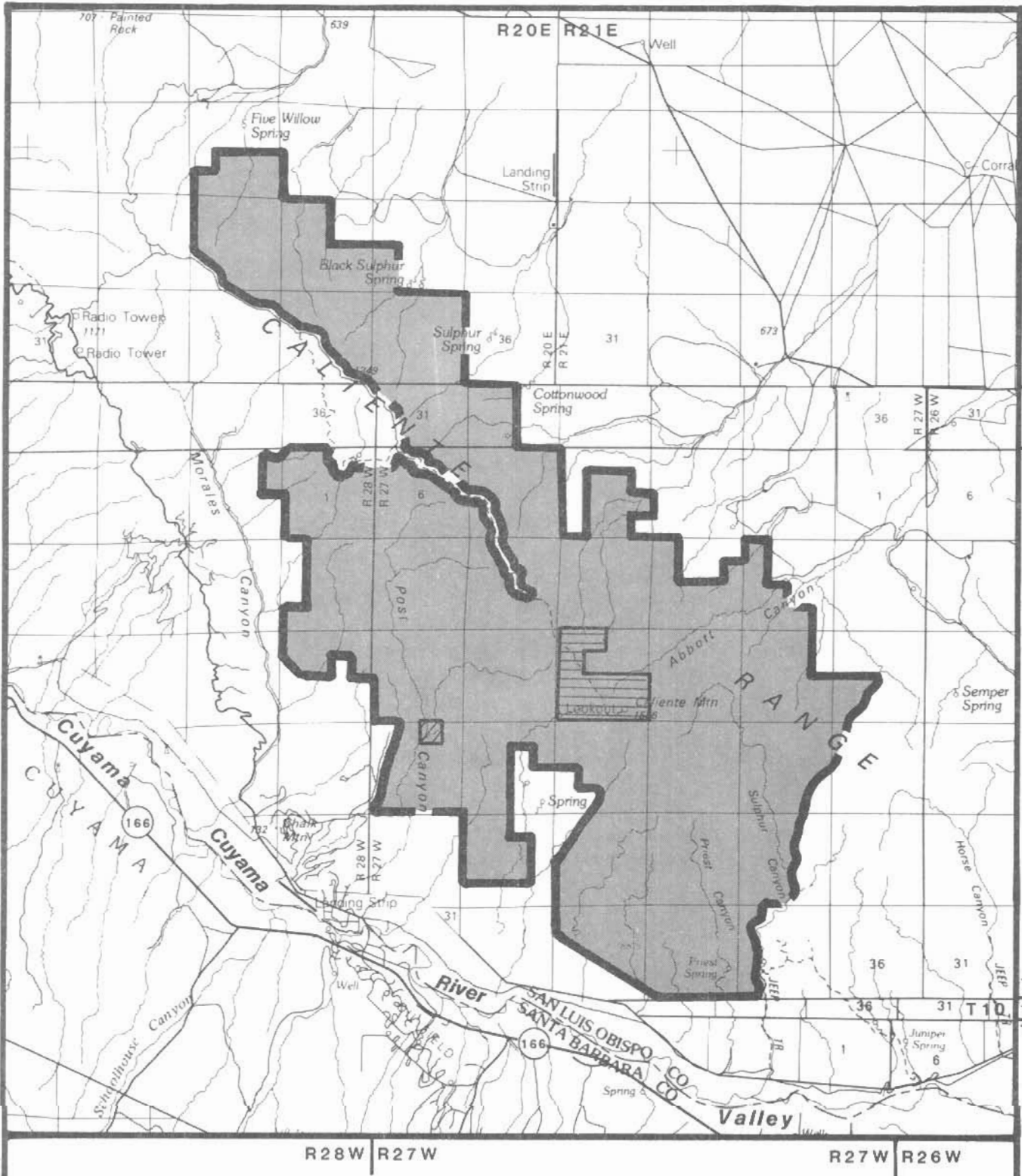
The WSA is recommended nonsuitable for the following reasons: the high potential for oil and gas exploration and development, the moderate potential for phosphate mineral deposits, the maintenance and continuation of the range program, and the continuance of the Caliente NCLWMA, all outweigh the area's wilderness values. Effective management of the area as wilderness would be difficult.

The WSA lends itself to other resource uses. Under the Bureau's recommendation, this area will remain open for oil and gas exploration and development due to the high potential for the occurrence of oil and gas reserves in the entire WSA. In addition, the west-central portion of the WSA has moderate potential for the occurrence of phosphate deposits.


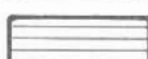

As stated in the Coast/Valley Resource Management Plan, livestock grazing will continue to be maintained at the existing level of 1,699 animal unit months (AUMs). Approximately 15,498 acres of the WSA is currently utilized for grazing. Six spring developments, four reservoirs, one corral with loading facilities, and a two-mile pipeline with troughs currently exist and will continue to be maintained with the use of motor vehicles. A 1,000-acre prescribed burn is proposed on the northern portion of the WSA. This burn is projected to create an additional 100 AUMs of livestock forage.

Being part of the Caliente NCLWMA, the area is managed by BLM in cooperation with CDF&G for the benefit of wildlife resources. Both agencies have been involved in water developments, which have significantly improved the habitat for upland game species. Wilderness designation would constrain management options, including motorized vehicle access to install additional water developments. There are approximately six miles of routes of travel including primitive ways, washes and other unmaintained routes of access which will remain available for vehicular use.

The area's irregular shape, combined with a lack of topographical or cultural features to delineate the boundaries, would make managing the area as wilderness difficult. Extensive signing, and in specific cases, fencing of the boundaries, would be necessary. The cherrystemmed road running along the ridgeline of Caliente Mountain detracts slightly from the natural character of the area.

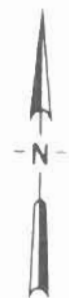


- |   |   |                            |
|---|---|----------------------------|
|  | NONE  | RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |
|  | RECOMMENDED FOR NONWILDERNESS               |                            |
|  | LAND OUTSIDE WSA RECOMMENDED FOR WILDERNESS |                            |

- |   |              |
|---|--------------|
|  | SPLIT ESTATE |
|  | STATE        |
|  | PRIVATE      |

**Caliente Mountain  
Proposal  
MAP-1**

0 1 2 3  
MILES



010-042  
JUNE, 1988

TABLE 1 - Land Status and Acreage Summary of the Study Area

<u>Within Wilderness Study Area</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	17,590
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Inholdings		
State		452
Private		41
Total		18,083
<u>Within the Recommended Wilderness Study Boundary</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(within WSA)	0
BLM	(outside WSA)	0
Split Estate	(within WSA)	0
Split Estate	(outside WSA)	0
Total BLM Land Recommended for Wilderness		0
Inholdings		
State		0
Private		0
<u>Within the Area Not Recommended for Wilderness</u>		<u>Acres</u>
BLM	(surface and subsurface)	17,590
Split Estate	(BLM surface only)	0
Total BLM Land Not Recommended for Wilderness		17,590

### 3. CRITERIA CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING THE WILDERNESS RECOMMENDATIONS

#### A. Wilderness Characteristics

1. Naturalness: The WSA has retained a high degree of natural character. The unit includes a sizable portion of the Caliente Mountain Range. The rugged and precipitous hills rise steeply from the valley floor with peaks along the primary ridgeline reaching elevations of 3,000 to 5,000 feet. Caliente Peak is the most prominent at 5,104 feet. Vegetation ranges from dense chaparral and juniper along the ridgeline to scattered shrubs and annual grasses in canyon floors.

An improved cherrystemmed road on the ridgeline of Caliente Mountain traverses a substantial portion of the unit, detracting slightly from the natural character of the area. Additionally, other imprints of man's activities include vehicle ways, fence lines, evidence of mineral exploration, and firebreaks in various locations in the unit.

2. Solitude: Varied topography and dense pockets of vegetation combine to produce outstanding opportunities for solitude, particularly in those areas removed from the southern and western boundaries of the WSA. In those areas adjacent to these boundaries, the feeling of isolation is severely impacted by oil and gas exploration activities, and the sights and sounds of vehicle traffic outside of the WSA, specifically on State Highway 166.

This WSA is periodically overflowed by military aircraft as part of the national defense mission taking place in approved military operating areas and flight corridors. The visual intrusions and associated noise create periodic temporary effects on solitude which are deemed necessary and acceptable as a part of the defense preparedness of the nation.

3. Primitive and unconfined recreation: Along the primary ridgeline, in the juniper flats, within the canyon and in the lower foothills, visitors can find extensive opportunities for isolation as well as unconfined freedom of movement for primitive recreational activities. Extreme daytime summer temperatures and a lack of water limit hiking and backpacking opportunities. Currently there is one public walk-in access to the Caliente Mountain WSA.
4. Special features: The WSA is along the historic flight path of the Federally-listed endangered California condor which flew over the Caliente Mountains enroute to the San Emigdio feeding area from its Machesna Mountain roost. All remaining condors have been captured and set up in a breeding program designed to return them to the wild. The peregrine falcon, also a Federally-listed endangered species occurs and feeds within the WSA.

B. Diversity in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS)

1. Assessing the diversity of natural systems and features as represented by ecosystems: This WSA contains 10,900 acres of the California Grassland/California Steppe ecosystem and 6,690 acres of the California Grassland/Juniper-Pinyon woodland ecosystems. The Caliente Mountain WSA would increase the diversity of the types of ecosystems represented in the NWPS. The California Grassland Province/Juniper-Pinyon Woodland and the California Grassland Province/California Steppe ecosystems are currently unrepresented in the NWPS.

Table 2 - Ecosystem Representation

Bailey-Kuchler Classification Domain/Province/PNV	NWPS Areas		Other BLM Studies	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>NATIONWIDE</u>				
California Grassland/				
California Steppe	0	0	2	17,859
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	0	0	0	0
<u>CALIFORNIA</u>				
California Grassland/				
California Steppe	0	0	2	17,859
Juniper-Pinyon Woodland	0	0	0	0

2. Expanding the opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation within a day's driving time (five hours) of major population centers: The WSA is within a five-hour drive of 14 major population centers. Table 3 summarizes the number and acreage of designated areas and other BLM study areas within a five-hour drive of the population centers.

Table 3 - Wilderness Opportunities for Residents of Major Population Centers

Population Centers	NWPS areas		Other BLM Studies	
	areas	acres	areas	acres
<u>California</u>				
Anaheim-Santa Ana	25	2,823,534	153	5,703,515
Bakersfield	32	4,071,358	128	3,998,548
Fresno	35	4,048,852	28	460,790
Los Angeles-Long Beach	27	2,876,234	135	4,958,751
Merced	33	3,957,550	25	348,753
Modesto	36	4,126,963	81	1,722,326
Oxnard-Ventura	23	2,195,198	85	2,703,260
Riverside-San Bernardino	22	2,031,054	205	7,658,649
Salinas-Seaside-Monterey	24	3,676,896	45	644,415
San Jose	27	3,765,512	29	352,748
Santa Barbara-Santa Maria				
Lompoc	20	1,166,142	35	528,590
Santa Cruz	27	3,765,512	32	407,890
Stockton	35	4,061,833	46	601,496
Visalia-Tulare-Porterville	34	4,431,635	61	1,681,921

3. Balancing the geographic distribution of wilderness areas: There are no other BLM WSAs within 50 air miles recommended for wilderness designation. The Santa Lucia and the Machesna Mountain Wilderness



Areas are located approximately 50 and 40 miles, respectively, northeast of the WSA. The San Rafael and Dick Smith Wilderness Areas are located 15 and 20 miles, respectively, to the south of the WSA. All areas mentioned are managed by the Los Padres National Forest.

C. Manageability

The Caliente Mountain WSA is manageable as wilderness, but only with extreme difficulty. Manageability problems include the overall irregular shape with predominantly sectional (rather than topographic or cultural features) boundaries, leading to difficult recognition on the ground. Frequent signing, detailed maps, patrolling and fencing along various segments of the border would be required to insure the integrity of the unit. Private and State inholdings, including Caliente Peak, have some potential for incompatible development. The cherry-stemmed road leading to the top of Caliente Peak, while providing access to the unit, also opens up the area to the vulnerability of off-highway vehicle trespass.

Military overflights in this WSA must be considered to maintain the integrity of the existing and future national defense mission as well as the wilderness resource.

D. Energy and Mineral Resource Values

1. Summary of information known at the time of the preliminary suitability recommendation: The energy and mineral resource potential of the Caliente Mountain WSA as described in the Affected Environment section of the 1987 BLM Wilderness Recommendations, Central California Study Areas, Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is based primarily on a BLM mineral assessment conducted in 1982, (Caliente Resource Area internal Memorandum, "Mineral Inventory of the Caliente WSA", March 23, 1982). The EIS identified an unknown potential for petroleum and uneconomic occurrences of phosphate. One pre-FLPMA oil and gas lease was known to extend into the WSA, covering 40 acres. Production was occurring on the lease just outside the WSA in February, 1987, under a unit agreement. As long as production continues on the lease, activities may extend into the WSA in the same manner and degree. About 8,720 acres of the WSA (or 48%) were covered by pre-FLPMA oil and gas leases during the late 1940s to 1950s, and again in the early 1970s. Five wells were drilled within the WSA. The Morales Canyon, Taylor Canyon and Russel Ranch Known Geologic Structures (KGSs) are within one mile of the southwestern and western boundaries of the WSA. The eastern portion is within the Caliente Mountain KGS established by the Minerals Management Service on January 17, 1982.

Approximately 800 acres in the western portion of the WSA was classified by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) in 1968 as prospectively valuable for phosphate ("Lands Valuable for Phosphate",



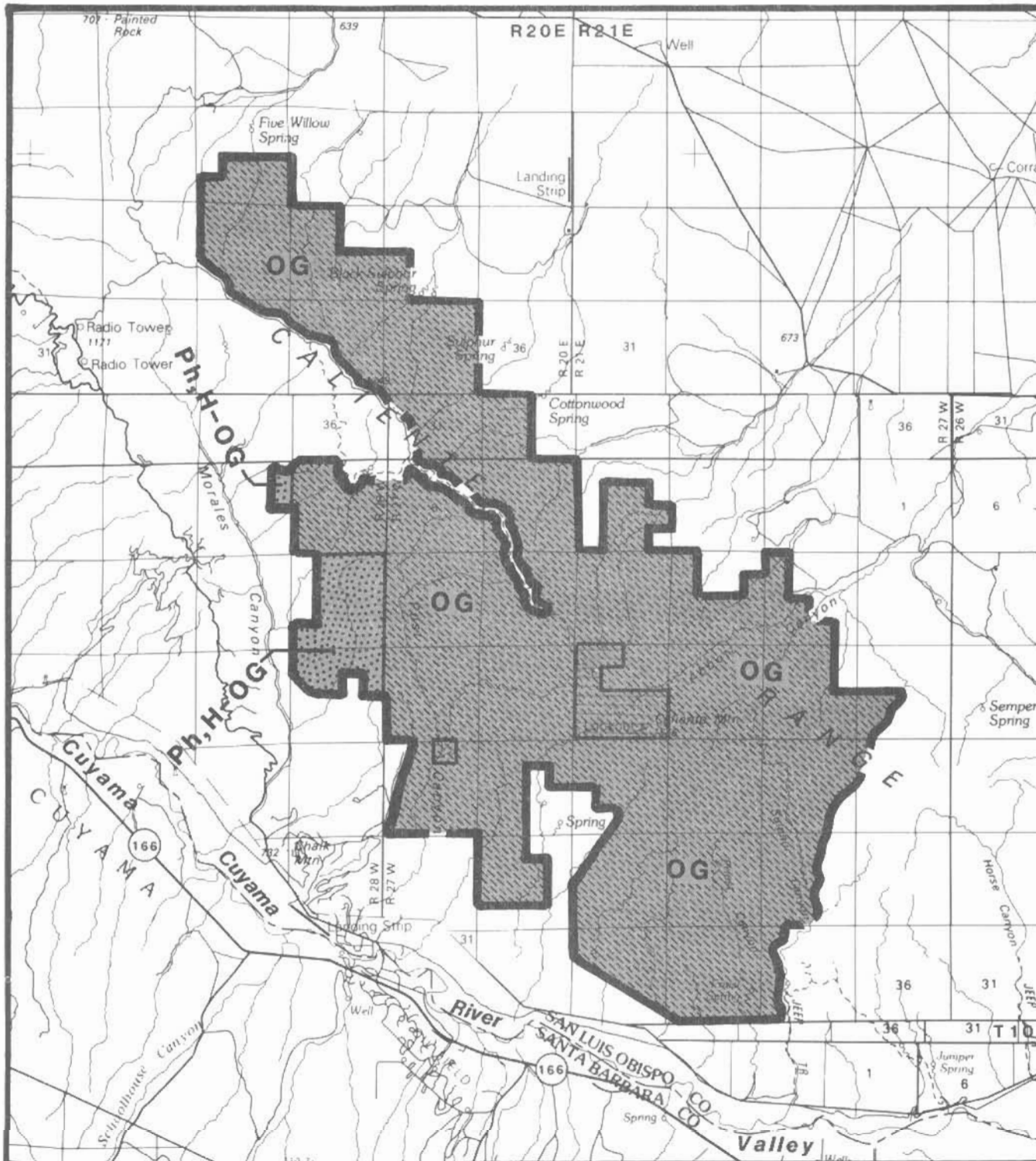
unpublished USGS map, January, 1979). No salable (common varieties of sand, stone, gravel, etc.) or locatable minerals were known to occur in the WSA and no unpatented mining claims were on file with BLM in February, 1987.

According to BLM's mineral assessment in 1982, approximately 1,500 acres in the southeast portion of the WSA had moderate potential for oil and gas development, with a low to moderate potential in the northwest portion. The western portion of the WSA was identified as having moderate potential for the occurrence of phosphate and a zero to low potential for the occurrence of locatable minerals.

2. Summary of significant new mineral resource data collected since the suitability recommendation, which should be considered in the final recommendation: Because this WSA was recommended non-suitable for wilderness by BLM, no USGS or U.S. Bureau of Mines (USEM) mineral surveys were conducted for the Caliente Mountain WSA.

Based on new "confidential" information purchased from GeoMap Company in 1988 ("Structural Analysis of the San Joaquin Basin", California Regional Base Map, No. CA-132, 1988), many new geologic structures were identified within this WSA by BLM. The WSA is predominantly underlain by the Monterey Shale of Miocene age. This new information shows numerous productive intervals for oil and gas that were previously unknown. New information about the oil and gas potential in the WSA is contained in a publication titled "Tertiary Tectonics and Sedimentation in the Cuyama Basin, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties, California" (Bazeley and Fritsche, editors, Cuyama Basin Fieldguide, A.A.P.G. Pacific Section, Annual Meeting, 1988). Based on this new information the entire Caliente Mountain WSA has been reclassified as having a high potential for the occurrence of oil and gas resources using the BLM mineral classification scheme.

New information on the occurrence of phosphate recently made available by the U.S. Forest Service, Los Padres National Forest, (Appendix to Los Padres National Forest EIS, AMS - Minerals Section p. XI-6 to XI-7 and Map #7, unpublished map by J. Joyce and H. Record, 1974-1981) indicates that the west-central portion of the WSA (see attached map) has moderate potential for the occurrence of phosphate deposits. BLM records dated March 25, 1988 show no unpatented mining claims, ten oil and gas leases comprising 1,516 acres, and four oil and gas lease applications comprising 5,575 acres in the unsuitable portion of the WSA.



MDM  
T32S  
T12N  
SBM

T11N

T11N  
T12N  
T10N

R28W R27W

R27W R26W

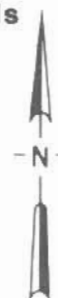
NONE	Recommended for Wilderness
	Recommended for Non Wilderness
	Land outside WSA Recommended for Wilderness
	Split Estate
	State
	Private

### Explanation

	High Potential for the Occurrence of Energy and/or Non-energy Minerals
	Moderate Potential for the Occurrence of Energy and/or Non-energy Minerals
M	Moderate Mineral Potential Location in a High Mineral Potential Area
H	High Mineral Potential Location in a Moderate Mineral Potential Area

### Commodity Symbols

OG Oil & Gas  
Ph Phosphate



**Caliente Mountain  
Mineral Resource Potential**

0 1 2 3  
MILES

**Map-2  
010-042**

E. Impacts on Resources

The following table summarizes the effects on pertinent resources for all alternatives considered including designation or non-designation of the entire area as wilderness. (For a full explanation of this summary, refer to the Central California Study Areas - Wilderness Final Environmental Impact Statement.)

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impact on Wilderness Values	<p>There will be a moderate, adverse impact on wilderness values on 15 to 20 percent of the WSA as a result of the noise and surface disturbance associated with the exploration of the area's oil and gas resources. These impacts, for the most part, will be short-term since production is not anticipated on 90 percent of the wells. Five wells will be developed, however, permanently impairing wilderness values on approximately 2 to 3 percent of the area.</p> <p>The present and projected levels of motorized and non-motorized recreational use, coupled with continued grazing use, prescribed burning, and the occasional maintenance of existing grazing developments, will minimally impair these values.</p>	<p>For the most part, wilderness values would be only negligibly impaired as a result of increased non-motorized recreation use and livestock grazing use and the maintenance of existing livestock improvements. However, the noise and surface disturbance associated with the exploration and development of 40 acres of pre-FLPMA oil and gas leases would significantly impact the wilderness values on and in the immediate vicinity of these lands.</p>

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative (Cont'd)

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impacts on Endangered Species	<p>There will be a moderate adverse impact on the foraging habitat of both the peregrine falcon and California condor as a result of the noise and visual intrusions associated with the exploration of the area's oil and gas resources. These impacts will, for the most part, be short-term since production is not anticipated on 90 percent of the wells. Five wells will be developed, however, permanently impairing forage habitat on approximately 2 to 3 percent of the area.</p> <p>The present and projected levels of motorized and non-motorized recreational use, coupled with continued grazing use, prescribed burning, and the occasional maintenance of existing grazing developments will minimally impact these values.</p>	<p>There will be a negligible impact on the foraging habitat of the peregrine falcon and California condor as a result of increased non-motorized recreational use. Noise and surface disturbances associated with the exploration and development of the 40-acre pre-FLPMA oil and gas lease would significantly impact the habitat on and in the immediate vicinity of these pre-FLPMA leased lands.</p>
Impact on Livestock Grazing Use	<p>Under the Proposed Action, livestock forage production will increase by 100 AUMs slightly benefiting livestock grazing use.</p>	<p>There would be no impact on existing livestock grazing levels. However, prescribed burns would be prohibited and the potential 100 AUMs of increased livestock forage would be foregone.</p>

Table 4 - Comparative Summary of the Impacts by Alternative (Cont'd)

ISSUE-RELATED RESOURCES	PROPOSED ACTION (NO-WILDERNESS/NO ACTION)	ALL-WILDERNESS ALTERNATIVE
Impact on Oil and Gas Exploration and Development	There will be no impact on oil and gas exploration.	With the exception of one 40-acre pre-FLPMA oil and gas lease, opportunities for oil and gas explora- tion over the entire WSA would be foregone.

F. Local Social and Economic Considerations

No local social or economic considerations were identified in the Final EIS. Therefore, no further discussion of this topic will occur in this document.

G. Summary of WSA - Specific Public Comments

Several comments were received during the wilderness inventory phase. These comments addressed potential mineral values (including uranium and oil and gas reserves) and potential utility siting and route corridors. One comment urged development of rockhounding access into the unit. One comment addressed the adverse influences of man's activities outside the unit.

During the study phase, a public hearing was held in Fresno, California. During the public hearing and the comment period, a total of 56 comments were received, both oral and written, related to this unit. Eleven comments supported the Bureau's no-wilderness alternative. Forty-six comments supported the all-wilderness alternative.

No Federal, State or County agency comments were received specific to this WSA. U.S. Congressman, Leon E. Panetta, favored wilderness designation, citing the value of the area's location within the condor and falcon feeding ranges and stating that cattle grazing standards would not be seriously reduced, access for naturalists and scientists would be retained, and mineral activities on pre-FLPMA oil and gas leases could continue under wilderness designation.